Finding Common Ground

Considering Skin Color from a Biblical Perspective

Robert C. Hepburn, D. Min.

TGTS 2.0 / YUBM Ministries / Philadelphia, PA

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By Robert C. Hepburn, D. Min.
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Finding Common Ground: Considering Skin Color from a Biblical Perspective

Robert C. Hepburn, D. Min.

Were you aware you're actually *wearing* the largest organ that comprises the human body? Skin! What an astonishing phenomenon: it's waterproof and washable; it insulates, cools and protects. It's remarkably stretchable and compressible, ranging from baby soft and silky supple to strategically seasoned tough and leathery. Our skin actually keeps us from evaporating. Tensile and resilient, it's able to bounce back from the constraints of tight-fitting garments, bumps and wounds – it's self-repairing and rejuvenate-able (to a point). Skin simultaneously doffs its old dead cells – pushing them out to the surface – while generating fresh, new living cells from within, for us to don. Talk about feeling renewed! Skin is tannable, tattoo-able[1] and even transferrable (graft-able).

Plus – skin is exquisitely and exhilaratingly touch-sensitive. Oh, the tingling *tactility!*

Look at you. Your own skin varies in color, texture, thickness and toughness across your body. The skin of your eyelid and the skin on the heel of your foot are *very* different. On average, this amazingly-crafted piece of exteriority can range anywhere from 0.5 to 4 millimeters thick, covering some 21 to 22 square feet on average for an adult and accounting for about 6% or 1/16th of one's body weight.[2]

Our skin has three layers: the outermost top layer is called the *epidermis*, the layer below that is the *dermis*, and the one beneath that is the *subcutis* or *hypodermis* (hence the term "hypodermic needle"). [Note the interesting parallel with the three animal skin coverings God instructed Moses to use for building the Jewish Tabernacle.] In the realm of first aid, the severity of skin burns – 1st, 2nd and 3rd degrees – corresponds to how deeply the skin has been burned.

Melanin is the natural black pigment we all have that gives our different skins each their distinctive variegated colors – by virtue of both the quantity of, and by how deeply-colored that melanin is (it also factors into our eye and hair colors). The colorations of human complexion vary widely – from deep bluish-black all the way through to light yellow-reddish-beige and beyond – with innumerable shades between. Exposure to ultraviolet radiation increases melanin production, bringing about a darkening of the skin (tanning). Albinism results from the inability of the body to produce melanin. It is especially worth noting this melanin that gives us each our unique skin color resides within the epidermis, *i.e.*, the topmost layer of our skin – the thickness of which averages out to roughly 0.1 mm – about the thickness of a piece of paper. Go down to the second layer of skin (the dermis), and everyone's skin starts looking pretty much the same.

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[1] With tattoos all the rage these days, when asked his views, said he, "I don't let them get under my skin."

[2] Morris Leider, M.D., "The Weight of Human Skin," *The Journal of Investigative Dermatology*, November 1948, 187-191, https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0022202X15503679/pdf.

With that said, a startling truth comes to the fore: the matter of differences in human skin color is essentially a surface issue – more precisely, a *0.1 mm* surface issue.

Skin in the Game of Life: Assessing the Biblical Record Regarding Skin and Its Color

Genesis 1:26-27 states that God created human beings in His own image (the *imago Dei*), which makes one's skin color God's call. It is He Who gave us each our magnificently-variegated "paint jobs" and it is for the praise of His glory. It stands to reason anyone having a problem with another's skin color (or, for that matter, any other feature of someone), might want to take the matter up with the One Who created that fellow image-bearer.

Common Ground Found: *Ex Uno Plures* (Out of the One, Many)

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image,
after our likeness." …

So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Genesis 1:26-28

… then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.

Genesis 2:7

Your hands fashioned and made me,
and now you have destroyed me altogether.
Remember that you have made me like clay;
and will you return me to the dust?
Did you not pour me out like milk
and curdle me like cheese?
You clothed me with skin and flesh,
and knit me together with bones and sinews.
You clothed me with skin and flesh,
and knit me together with bones and sinews.

Job 10:8-11

For you formed my inward parts;
you knitted me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;
my soul knows it very well.
My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes saw my unformed substance;
in your book were written, every one of them,
the days that were formed for me,
when as yet there was none of them.

Psalm 139:13-16

And he made from one man every nation of mankind …

Acts 17:26

The Old Testament mentions human skin[3] in Exodus 22:26, 34:29, 30, 35; Job 7:5, 10:11; Jeremiah 13:23 [of the Cushite, though skin color is not directly mentioned], Lamentations 3:4, and Ezekiel 37:6, 8. Skin color shows up in a few passages: young David's ruddiness (1 Samuel 16:12), the woman who speaks of her sun-darkened, black, beautiful skin in the Song of Songs 1:5-6, and one or two possible indirect prophetic references regarding women's complexions. A final skin-related term worth noting is foreskin (עָרְלָה) which echoes in the New Testament in the matter of circumcision. Thought: Might Christ's bodily resurrection give indication that this, our present skin, is best understood as *the 'fore?*

[3] There are a few OT references to animal skins being used to cover the Tabernacle and in burnt offerings.

The only definitive New Testament mention of human skin is χρωτός, Acts 19:12 (having accounted for Synoptic Gospels texts about leprosy). There are wine-skins (άσκοὺς, Matt 9:17, Mark 2:22, Luke 5:37 [made from the skins of goats, sheep or oxen]) and animal skins worn as clothing (δερματίνην, Matthew 3:4, Mark 1:6; δέρμασιν, Hebrews 11:37, *cf.* Genesis 3:21, 27:16), but "flesh" is the New Testament's closest "human skin" referent. ***There is no New Testament mention of skin color.*** While no one knows for certain Jesus' skin color, we do have this: His Father chose it as part of the body prepared for Him: Psalm 40:6-8, Hebrews 10:5-7.

The New Testament's silence on this ought to make skin color a non-issue. Us being created in God's image indicates we are significantly different from the rest of creation. Essentially, we are spiritual beings *first*, with our mortal material bodies secondary. J. M. Kushiner put it this way: *"spiritual beings made body and soul by God."* As such, this means skin color is ultimately a surface (!) issue, an outward appearance which man looks upon, while the LORD is looking elsewhere – on the heart (1 Samuel 16:7).

Imagine for a moment the LORD God picking a skin color for each of us to have forever in His Eternal Heaven – but it was very different from the color we have now. *Would we be OK with that?* Believing we would, why then would we have a problem with the skin color others now have that doesn't "coordinate" with our own skin's "color palette"?

Respect Issues

Having respect for others (creatures) begins with having respect for the God Who created them (as well as you yourself). Respect starts with the vertical respective: we need to give our Creator God the respect He is due. If we do not (*i.e.*, diminish, discount or flat-out deny Him that right), then we are pretty much left with a horizontal free-for-all where an ever-shifting Nietzschean "will to power" comes into play. Having proper respect for God extends to having proper respect for all that He has made – including other people. Not having proper respect for Him or others reveals an insubordinate attempt to co-opt His authority for one's own selfish ambitions.

God is not a "respecter of persons" (προσωπολήμπτης : *prosōpolēmptēs* : literally, a "face receiver" or "receiver of faces"). God does not accept or receive persons based on "face" value. He is not as taken with appearances as much as we appear to be. He corrected the prophet Samuel who seemed more focused on how a replacement king for Saul should "look" (outwardly), rather than on how a Godly king should "be" (inwardly). 1 Samuel 16:7 Compare that with the Pharisees' disciples' statement (with the Herodians present), acknowledging to Jesus' face (!) that "there is not care [or concern] to You about anyone, for You do not look on the appearance [literally "the face," "countenance," or "surface"] of men" (πρόσωπον ἀνθρώπων in Matthew 22:15-16, *cf.* Mark 12:14, Luke 20:21).

We see the word "face receiver" in Acts 10:34, where the Apostle Peter learns that God's Kingdom door has now been opened to the Gentiles. Paul uses a slight variant of the term in

Romans 2:11, Ephesians 6:9 and Colossians 3:25; James uses a couple of slight variants of it in his epistle (2:1, 9), and Peter uses yet another slight variant of it in 1 Peter 1:17.

If the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ warned against the practice being "face accepters / receivers," why then do we persist in doing so? That's a theological issue and discussion for another time, but for now, let's take look at how we look at "looks."

The Challenge of Changing the Way We Look at People

We need to go deeper than just looking at skin color. How we answer the following question will go a long way toward understanding (and perhaps even changing) how we look at people who look different than we do. Consider which of these two statements you believe to be true:

We are essentially material beings with spiritual natures,

or,

we are essentially spiritual beings housed in material bodies.

The first statement sounds about right at first – but then there's that qualifying adverb, "essentially," creating a bit of dissonance and hesitancy. Is our creational "essence" *truly* "material" or are we something more? Here's where the *imago Dei* comes into play.

When God formed Adam out of the ground (imagine the LORD God getting dirt under His nails!), Adam *existed as a material creation* (Genesis 2:7). Matter (material) comprised the inanimate form known as "man," but it wasn't until the LORD God breathed into the form's (Adam's) nostrils that he came a living animate creature, brought to life by the Spirit of the Living God. ("In Him we live and move and have our being," said Paul, quoting the Cretan (Gentile!) poet Epimenides, whose lyrics Paul was familiar with and were incorporated into God's Word [Acts 17:28]). Now there's something more going on there in the garden of Eden – something more than just another material form moving about. The *imago Dei* (image of God) now presents – the completing half coming soon after (via a "ribectomy") in the person of Eve. Her presence completes and perfects the new creature: *human beings*.

Perhaps we struggle with the "other-worldly" way the second statement presents itself. "It's not rooted and grounded in the day-to-day real world that I'm struggling to get through these days," some might say. It might *appear* (!) that way, but if we take the second statement as the more accurate way of understanding ourselves, then the creation of human beings in God's image – as well as the Fall, the validation of the importance of the human body in Christ's incarnation, His ministry, His work on the cross, the redoubled validation of the importance of the human body presented in His resurrection from the dead, His ascension, sovereign reign, *our current struggles* [note the *in medias res* placement] met *in situ* with His present intercessory ministry, His Second Coming (with

believers' resurrection bodies rising to meet Him), and the Consummation – indeed, *all* of human history – takes on much greater significance. [4]

Thinking of ourselves as essentially spiritual beings housed in material bodies does not diminish the significance of our physical materiality (*cf.* Romans 15:27, James 2:15-16, 1 John 3:17-18), nor does it diminish the significance of the physical material world. God *created* matter, speaking its variegated forms into existence, and declares them all "good" on each of the 1st, 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 6th days.[5] Then, again, on the 6th day, after He creates human beings (in a literally "hands-on" way!), in His image (Adam is created out of the dust of the ground [matter!], and Eve is created from out of Adam's rib [matter!]), God then goes superlative declaring everything that He made "*very* good" (Genesis 1:31, *emphasis added*).[6] This constitutes God's original created order which would become a fallen creation order after Adam and Eve eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 3).

Imagine for a moment where you'd like to be a hundred years from now. It's likely something very different than what you are experiencing right now. Now, extend that same forecast and prospect to everyone you come across today. The bodies and behaviors are temporal but each person is in some away hoping for and awaiting some kind of transformation. And according to the One Who created all things, that change will indeed come! Being keenly aware of that prospect will change how we look at and treat other

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[4] The naturalist/material monist's core understanding of man is that he is, in essence, a material being – nothing more. There's no soul or spirit. The pantheist/spiritual monist's core understanding of man is that he is essentially a spiritual being: whatever appears to be material is illusory and needs to be overcome. The polytheist/animist/spiritist's core understanding of man is that he is essentially a material being (a surprising but hidden priority) with a spiritual nature (spirits are objectified and become idolatrous). The non-Christian (Jewish, Islamic, Sikh, *et al*) theist's core understanding of man can only move towards that of the polytheist/animist/spiritist. Without knowledge of the triune, Personal, self-revealing, incarnate, redeeming God to give it meaning, their understanding of human beings can only degenerate into a lower view of man. Christ's incarnation has absolutely everything to do with the creation of man, and to miss Him is to miss out completely on who and what we really are. The Biblical monotheist (*i.e.*, possessing salvific faith in the triune, Personal, self-revealing, incarnate, redeeming God) understands human beings as essentially spiritual beings (first in priority) housed in material bodies (secondarily). From this perspective it is easier to understand racism as the result of (fallen) social constructs – spiritual strongholds – with our truest battles being not with flesh and blood but with spiritual forces of evil. Eph 6:12ff. Within the postmodern age we are now presented with the prospects of post-humanity – once confined to the realm of highly-imaginative science fiction but now technologically feasible – interfacing human beings with machines (rapidly advancing neural, robotic medical innovations, machines becoming more "human" (robots, artificial intelligence: *viz.* IBM's Watson®, Apple's Siri®, Google's Assistant®, Amazon's Alexa®, Samsung's Bixby®), or maybe a sort of evolutionary technological "advance" (cyborgs? singularity by 2029? alien intervention?).

[5] Both the creation of the heavens on the 2nd day (Genesis 1:6-8) and the creation of human beings on the 6th day (1:26-27) lack the divine declaration, "[*was*] good," which, at face value, indicates something is missing. Nevertheless, the 6-day creation narrative concludes with God declaring, "[*it was*] very good" (Genesis 1:31).

[6] God's Personal and direct involvement in the creation counters the false gnostic teaching that a spiritual, pure and good God could not directly create a material, impure and evil world. Instead, He used a series of buffering, Self-distancing emanations to bring it into existence.

people – fellow divine image-bearers – some who have already been adopted into His forever family through faith in Christ, and those who are still (prayerfully) "on the way."

Saul's Understanding vs. Paul's Understanding

It could perhaps be argued that prior to his conversion Saul looked at Jesus and His ministry with the mindset that human beings are essentially material beings with spiritual natures. (*cf.* 2 Corinthians 5:16). But after meeting the ascended glorified Christ on the road to Damascus – during which Jesus gave a hometown Nazareth shoutout – Saul / Paul had a transformed view – not just of Jesus, but of *all* human beings as well (2 Corinthians 5:17). All are either "potential" or "realized" new creations in Christ and equipped with that outlook he went forth boldly, broadly and beseechingly in the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:11-21). Let's take a step back for a moment to look at the intent and purpose of Christ's incarnation – that the work of reconciliation and ministry of reconciliation might be accomplished.

God with Us (Creation: The Narrative Setting & Dramatis Personae): Divine Initiative

In the beginning (the original created order), Adam and Eve were in perfect dimensional communion with the LORD God their Creator (spiritually), with each other (socially), with their selves (psychologically), and with nature (environmentally). It was *all good* (Genesis 1:31) – in the truest and fullest sense of the phrase – a state of perfect innocence and incredible growth potential. But their innocence would be tested. Would they as the *imago Dei* (image of God) understand their status as creatures in proper relation to their Creator?

God Withholds from Us (Fall: The Narrative "Tying"): Divine Interdiction

God's warning to them ("do not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil") is put to the test through another creature: the serpent. Supernaturally-possessed and empowered, it succeeds in its enticement – they eat and sin enters the human race. Deception and disobedience bring about seismic separative shifts in each of the above-mentioned relational dimensions, most significantly the one with their Maker. Their once innocent eyes now opened the reality of evil within, their souls are now spiritually separated from their Creator. They are beset by fear, shame and guilt. Sewing large fig leaves together, they fashion garments in an attempt to cover their nakedness (Genesis 3:7). When they hear the sound[7] of Him walking in the cool of the day, they try to hide from His Presence (3:8). No can do. Confronted, they resort to words in their attempts to "cover up," each blaming the one "down the line." Divine judgments follow (in poetic format and in reverse hierarchal

[7] *"Make some noise!"* The LORD God is *heard* walking in the garden, suggesting a theophany – an anthropomorphic Presence vs. one that is solely spiritual (*cf*. Genesis 18). The Divine perambulation created sound waves which in turn were picked up by the skin membranes inside Adam and Eve's ears, prompting a futile attempt to hide themselves from Him among the trees of the garden (Genesis 3:8).

creation order – serpent, woman, man), and after God provides animal skins to cover their human skin (3:21 – the first recorded substitutionary sacrifice in Scripture), Adam and Eve are exorcised from the garden of Eden. But God does not abandon them. He was still with them, looking after them and their descendants, generally operating behind-the-scenes, in obscured incognito ways. And He is with us as well, all these many generations later. Conducting His operations in this "undercover" manner (b/k/a Providence), sets up the most stunning of His all interactions with human beings: the incarnation – the "in the flesh" appearance of Christ – God stepping onto the stage of His creation, locking Himself into time and space. The Ultimate "Undercover Boss" comes to earth to do what no other human being could do – accomplish redemption via a Divine substitutionary intervention.

God with Skin (Redemption: The Narrative "Loosing" [A]): Divine Incarnation

In the fullness of time God sent forth His Son, born of a woman and born under the Law (Galatians 4:4). God said it was going to happen, alerting His people through Moses and the Mosaic Law (*e.g.*, Genesis 3:15, Deuteronomy 18:18, *et al*), and through the Old Testament prophets (*e.g.*, Isaiah 7:14, chapter 53, Micah 5:2, *et al*). It is remarkable that God the Son – Jesus of Nazareth – developed *in utero* in the same manner as you and I, as laid out in Job 10:8-11 and Psalm 139:13-16 (above), which the writer of Hebrews affirms in 2:14-17:

> Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, He himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death He might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. For surely it is not angels that He helps, but He helps the offspring of Abraham. Therefore He had to be made like His brothers in every respect, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

Consider the intimacies of Jesus receiving and/or initiating skin to skin contact: at His birth in Bethlehem of Judea – with His mother Mary and stepfather Joseph in the marvels of infancy (including His being circumcised on the 8th day[8]), of toddlerhood and childhood. Jesus touches a leper, heals a blind man with mud He made by spitting on the ground, forming and then daubing it onto the man's eyes, takes Peter by the hand as Peter began to sink beneath the waves after walking on the water. He has His feet wetted by the tears of a sinful woman who then wipes them with her hair, followed by her kissing them and then anointed with ointment. After His death His body is removed from the cross and prepared for burial. After His resurrection Mary Magdalene and the other Mary take hold of Jesus'

[8] For thorough and thought-provoking discussions of the significance and social dynamics of the Jewish rite of circumcision, see Philip J. King, "Circumcision: Who Did It, Who Didn't and Why," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 32, no. 4 (2006): 49-51, 53-55; William H.C. Propp, "Circumcision: The Private Sign of the Covenant," *Bible Review* 20, no. 4 (2004): 23-26, 28-29, 44-45; and Robert G. Hall, "Epispasm – Circumcision in Reverse," *Bible Review* 8, no. 4 (1992): 52-56.

feet and worship Him (*vs*. an earlier encounter when Mary Magdalene is alone with the risen Christ and not allowed to touch Him. *Much respect for honoring and preserving boundaries, mitigating the possibilities of rumor and innuendo by having witnesses*). [*N.B.* He had yet to be glorified after His ascension some 40 days later.] John later bears witness to Jesus (the Word of Life) being 1) heard, 2) seen with the eyes, 3) looked upon (*i.e.*, studied closely / carefully observed), and 4) *touched with our hands*. 1 John 1:1 (*emphasis added*)

Note the several instances where Jesus' skin is exposed during His ministry, starting with His baptism by John in the Jordan River. Near the end of His incarnational ministry, He removes His garments at the Last Supper to prepare to wash His disciples' feet. He is later stripped of His clothes by Roman soldiers and then whipped. He is mercilessly exposed on a Roman cross outside the city's gates, drying out (*"I thirst"*), crying out (*"It is finished"*), and then dying. *Out*. Jesus is fully exposed in death as Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus use an aromatic mixture of myrrh and aloes combined with linen wrappings to prepare His body for burial according to the custom of the Jews. After His resurrection He appears to His disciples and shows them the nail wounds in His hands and feet, and (presumably after shifting His clothing), the spear wound in His side. Later, He invites doubting Thomas to bring his finger to the wounds in His hands and then to thrust his hand into His side.

God with Wounds (Redemption: The Narrative "Loosing" [B]): Divine Intervention

Indeed, the incarnate Son of God, Jesus received bodily wounds – the first with Him being circumcised on the eighth day in covenantal accordance with the Mosaic Law (an important aspect of being born under the Law in Galatians 4:4). While we don't know if He sustained any wounds while learning the carpenter's trade with His stepdad Joseph, the more important takeaway is Him showing up in the flesh palpably demonstrates God making Himself vulnerable (a concept anathema to many street-oriented types earnestly striving to project a strong sense of invincibility). Vulnerability, it turns out, is a vital component of the mystery of godliness. Here is the omnipotent Living God – the Creator of the universe – making Himself vulnerable within His own creation – *to the point of death*. The thought simultaneously challenges, confounds and upends our thinking about what God is able to do, as well as what He asks of us:

> Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11)
>
> Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness:

He was manifested in the flesh,
vindicated by the Spirit,
seen by angels,
proclaimed among the nations,
believed on in the world,
taken up in glory. (1 Timothy 3:16)

God the Son showing up enveloped / encased in human skin accomplishes precisely what was needed – a willing, substitutionary, perfect Self-sacrifice to accomplish the redemption of fallen humanity (the Just One dying on behalf of the unjust ones).

But He was pierced for our transgressions;
He was crushed for our iniquities;
upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with His wounds we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on Him
the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:5-6)

His skin already torn and bleeding from being lashed with a whip, His hands (wrists) and feet are pierced by large nails, affixed to a Roman cross. After death His side (upper torso) is pierced by a soldier's spear to ensure He was indeed dead. Blood and water gush from the substantive wound, indicating damaged tissues and capillaries had leaked watery fluid from the blood into the tissues, resulting in "a build-up of fluid around the heart (pericardial effusion) and lungs (pleural effusion)."[9] As brutal and gory as Jesus' death on the cross is, it results in the satisfactory full payment for sin once and for all, the redemptive transaction fully attested to as such by His resurrection from the dead. F'*real*, f'real. *It is finished*.

God within Us (Consummation: The Narrative Finale): Divine Indwelling

During the Last Supper Jesus told His disciples the Holy Spirit Who at that time was ***with*** them would soon be ***in*** them (John 14:17). That promise was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), and now believers in Christ are temples of the Holy Spirit (16:19-20). God the Holy Spirit (aka the Spirit of Christ) dwells within believers with all the variegated colors of human skin. Paul writes to the Galatians about his being again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ was formed in them, leaving him perplexed (4:19-20). He later writes to the Colossian saints that it is Christ ***in*** them that constitutes their hope of glory (1:27).

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[9] Cahleen Shrier, Ph.D. (adapted by Tally Flint), "The Science of the Crucifixion," *APU Life*, Spring 2002, Azusa, CA: Azusa Pacific University, https://www.apu.edu/articles/the-science-of-the-crucifixion/

Going Forward

C. S. Lewis offers a transformative way of looking at other people in *The Weight of Glory*:

> It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no "ordinary" people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations – these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub and exploit – immortal horrors or everlasting splendours. This does not mean that we are to be perpetually solemn. We must play. But our merriment must be of that kind (and it is, in fact, the merriest kind) which exists between people who have, from the outset, taken each other seriously – no flippancy, no superiority, no presumption. And our charity must be a real and costly love, with deep feeling for the sins in spite of which we love the sinner – no mere tolerance or indulgence which parodies love as flippancy parodies merriment.[10]

What if we were to adopt Lewis's perspective? Would we begin to see the kinds of change everybody's clamoring for? Apart from God's grace it is doubtful the world is going to find truly equitable and workable solutions to the situations surrounding skin color. It is equally doubtful the saints will find change possible as long as we are preoccupied with outward appearances. But what if we were to follow Samuel, Peter, James, Paul and others (*e.g.*, Nathanael [John 1:45-49], Philip [Acts 8:26-39], John [1 John 4:19-21] in utilizing God's very different focus rather than the one we seem to be preoccupied with at present?

We find common ground in our perspective on skin color in the truth that indeed God made from one man (Adam [Genesis 2:7]) every nation of mankind (Acts 17:26), and it is to the purpose and praise of His glory that He has Personally appointed and given us each *His* choice of our variegated appointed "paint jobs."

Following our Lord Jesus in this challenging matter in these challenging times asks of us a challenging exercise of our faith: we are to walk by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7).

Father God, forgive us. We confess to You, our Maker, our sin of idolatry in the form of racial pride. Forgive us for grieving Your Holy Spirit, hindering Your Kingdom's interests and work, allowing ourselves to be seduced into bowing down to the idolatrous social construct we call "race." *You do not show favoritism. Deliver us from* us, *Lord Jesus. Make us more like You regarding this matter.*[11]

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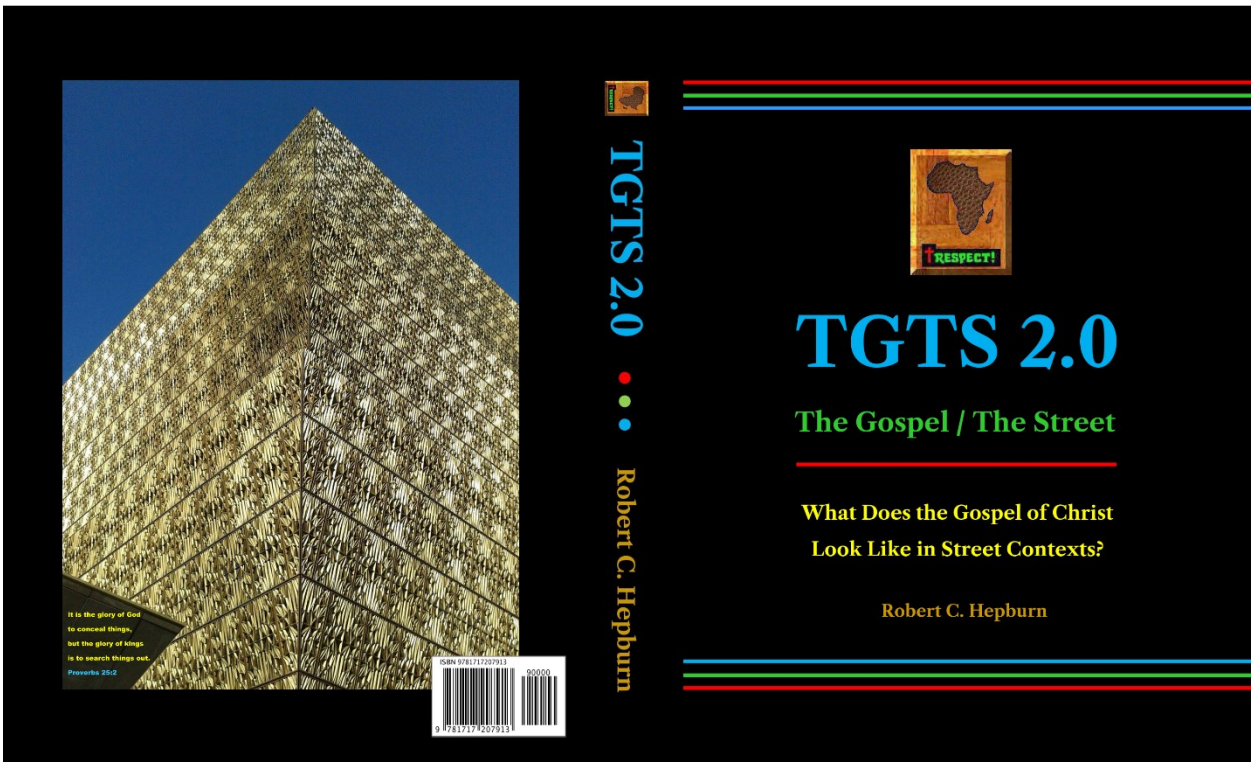
[10] C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (New York: HarperOne/Harper Collins, 2009), 45-46.

[11] Portions of this article adapted from *TGTS 2.0: The Gospel / The Street* by Robert C. Hepburn, D. Min. (2017).

More from Robert C. Hepburn, D. Min.



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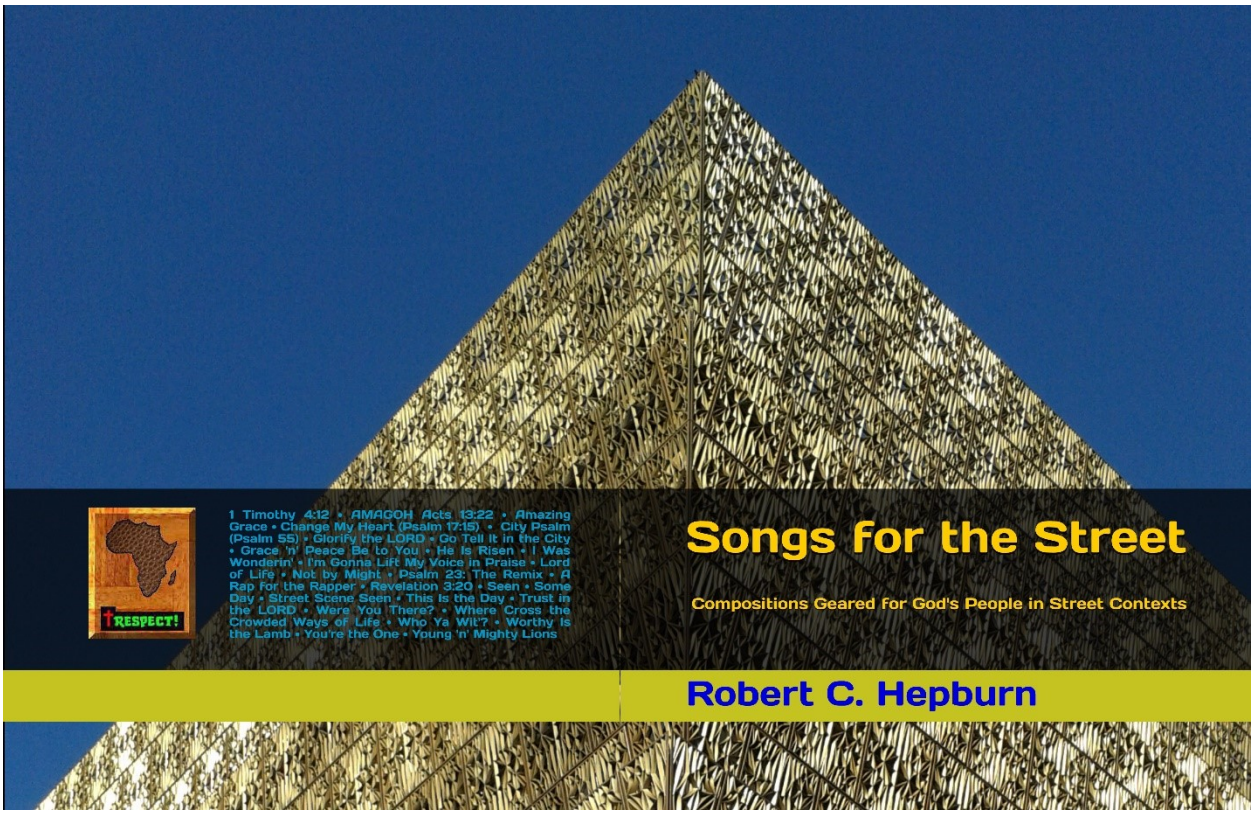
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It is the glory of God
to conceal things,
but the glory of kings
is to search things out.
Proverbs 25:2